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ABSTRACT

The speaker notes the rise in the rate of violence and vandalism in the schools and cites a poll indicating how important secondary school principals think the problem is. He lists a number of factors contributing to school crime--the breakdown of the family and family control, glamorization of violence on television and film, street crime, drug abuse, anonymity in the neighborhood and school, a philosophy of self-serving expediency, subgroup solidarity with no allegiance to the larger society, and contempt for the value of personal and public property. Six contributing factors perhaps seen more clearly by secondary school principals than by other citizens, are lethargic courts, openness of schools, student rights, teacher apathy, parent ignorance and/or indifference, and the collateral curriculum (the influences on a child that do not come from the school). The speaker recommends the enactment of legislation similar to the Safe Schools Act, prompt attention by the courts to acts of alleged crime in the schools, curriculum reform to meet the heterogeneity of student needs, involvement of students in all programs, and establishment of innovative programs such as using "trailer watchers" on school grounds. (IRT)

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School Violence and Vandalism

by

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Executive Secretary
National Association of Secondary School Principals

Statement to
Sub-Committee to Investigate
Juvenile Delinquency

The Honorable Birch Bayh, Chairman
U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Washington, D.C.

April 16, 1975

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The National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Drive, Reston, Virginia 22091

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Sub-Committee:

It is a privilege to appear before the distinguished members of this Committee to discuss the increasingly critical problems of vandalism and violence in our schools. I am appearing today as the official representative of the NASSP, a 35,000 member organization of secondary school administrators who in turn have responsibilities for 20 million American youth. Most of these young men and women practice responsible school and community citizenship on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the percentage of those *who do not* is increasing alarmingly. In January 1974, at the request of the Chairman, the NASSP presented documented evidence of this increase to the Senate Sub-Committee.

Violence and vandalism have moved, just in one decade, from being an ancillary and occasional problem in the life of the secondary school principal to a position of oppressive and ever-present dominance. Events are forcing the school principal to devote increasing amounts of time and energy to resolving problems of crime among the student body. This concentration of effort takes him away from duties he was employed to perform, i.e., to improve the academic program and the quality of instruction. As a result the students are short-changed.

Violence and vandalsim in the secondary schools was once confined to a very few "Blackboard Jungle" schools found in the central cities. But now incidents of student crime appear throughout the nation. As you have already found in your earlier study, hundreds of thousands of pupils are assaulted each year and the property losses exceed half a billion dollars.

Let me give you an example of the frightening growth of the problem in a large suburban high school located in the State of Illinois. This institution would be on anyone's list of the best 100 high schools in the nation. You would not, however, recognize any excellence in these data on violence and vandalism:

Summary of Incidents
Large Suburban High School
State of Illinois

Category	*1970-71*	*1973-74*
larceny	26	105
fighting	29	47
assaults	12	11
trespass	22	30
locker break-in	90	167
vandalism	27	71
bomb threat	4	6

Reports through March 30, 1975, show a continued rise of incidents for the current year. Another major city high school must time its dismissal bells to coincide with the arrival of police cruisers that proceed slowly along adjacent streets to keep rival gangs on opposite sidewalks from colliding in open warfare.

Each year the National Association of Secondary School Principals polls its membership on a number of issues in school administration and curriculum. Responding to the poll of April 1974, the secondary school principals of this nation reported five problems to be of "rising frequency or concern." These were:

(1) student vandalism and violence

(2) defiance by students, ignoring rules

(3) lack of time (or wasted time, neglect of studies)

(4) smoking

(5) absenteeism (A just completed NASSP study will be appended to this testimony.[1] The subject relates closely to the issues of vandalism and violence.)

This poll establishes for the Association some clear distinctions. First, the "old" problems of the principalship—those of the late 1960s—are not the new problems of the principalship. Ques-

[1]Note to readers: The study referred to here is reported in *The Practitioner*, Vol. 1, No. 1, Mar. 1975, "Student Attendance and Absenteeism."

tions of student expression, student dress, and student activism no longer have central stage. Second, the growing incidence of crime in school seldom centers around student-adult conflict. Third, the crime spree of the Seventies is flourishing despite school reforms made in response to student and parent demands for more freedom. And fourth, the principal feels inundated by a sea of demands, with vandalism and violence representing the latest and highest wave.

For those who assume that these unfortunate acts are confined to the later years of high school and early adulthood, I call the Committee's attention to two pipe bomb makers apprehended in a Midwestern community just three weeks ago. They were selling these crude but lethal bombs to classmates at 35 cents each. Their ages? 12 and 14!

Schools do not glorify assault. They do not teach violence. The ideal of the common good and of the rule of law is represented in the administration of the school, in the teacher's classroom, in the content of the curriculum, and in student activities. What, then, is the problem? What are the causes of these problems in schools? What are the sources of aggression? And, more importantly, what remedial actions might be implemented?

The immediate task facing the principal is to maintain the safety and welfare of students. This requires, in these new times, greater supervision over cafeterias, hallways, stairwells, restrooms, and the exterior grounds than formerly was necessary. Consequently, an entirely new staff position has appeared in the typical secondary school, that of student security officer. In 1965 probably no more than 25 school systems employed such personnel. Today, school security personnel are typical. More large secondary schools (1,000 or more students) employ them than do not employ them. Over 15,000 non-uniformed, school-employed security personnel are serving schools during the current school year. The growth has been geometric, reflecting the seriousness of the problem, and no section of the nation has been excluded. Within the past month I observed school budget preparations in Anchorage, Alaska. For the first time in the city's history, $400,000 was being requested for security purposes—money which most assuredly could have been put to better educational uses.

The long range objective of the principal is to change the situation, to erase the climate of fear, and to make schools once again safe for learning. To reach this objective the principal is dependent upon the larger society as well as upon circumstances within the school.

The contributing factors to school crime are as complex as society itself. We know them all: (1) breakdown of the family and family control, (2) glamorization of violence on television and film, (3) street crime by youth which spills into the school, (4) drug abuse, (5) anonymity in the neighborhood and school, (6) a philosophy of self-serving expediency with little concern for others, (7) subgroup solidarity, with no allegiance to the larger society, (8) contempt for the value of personal and public property.

Other contributing factors, perhaps seen more clearly by the secondary school principal than by other citizens, are these:

1. **Lethargic Courts.** The actions of the courts are often delayed or equivocal, encouraging students to consider themselves "beyond the law" and causing a feeling of helplessness among the victims. Typically it takes two months to get a ruling on a simple case of trespass. More serious cases take longer to adjudicate. By calling for a series of continuances, the defendant's attorney can delay decisions for months. A male teacher of English, who was threatened by a student with a broken bottle because the teacher had reported the student for being on campus after being suspended from school, was required to leave his teaching post and make three court appearances over a period of nine months. In each instance the case was continued without testimony. The teacher, meanwhile, received telephone threats upon his life. He moved to another apartment and used an unlisted telephone number. Ultimately, despairing of any positive court action, he applied to another school district, was employed, and resigned his tenured position in the old district. The effect upon the morale of his fellow teachers was devastating. *Under current procedures, many courts do not provide enforcement of the laws adequate to protect the safety and welfare of students and teachers on campus.* This problem is compounded by the tendency of judges—occasionally described as both soft hearted and soft

headed—to sidestep the problem and refer the students back to schools for custodial purposes to "keep them off the streets."

2. **Openness of Schools.** One factor in the increased tide of violence and vandalism in the schools is the increased openness and lack of controls placed upon young people today. This change is not limited to the schools, of course, but applies to American youth and their behavior generally in the society. It should also be recognized that the mention of this change in society's treatment of youth is not intended as a criticism, no less a lament.

In many ways, the current attitude toward youth—and the freedom conferred upon them—is a good thing in our opinion, not only for the young people themselves, but for society as a whole. Recognizing the general merits of this change should not blind us, however, to the adverse side effects that may result, and I believe have resulted, from the new freedom of youth. A certain proportion of young people just have not been able to use their freedom constructively and positively. Coupled with their health, strength, and energy, this freedom has made it possible for a relatively small percentage of young people to cause serious injury to persons and great damage to property. As we, and others, will testify, this damage has been greater nowhere than in the schools. In one major Eastern city the superintendent has indicated that necessary instructional equipment, e.g., film projectors, typewriters, microscopes, band instruments, etc., seldom will last a week without damage or theft. The resulting academic program is currently in a shambles.

3. **Student Rights.** There is room for argument as to how large the group may be which is abusing its freedoms. Argument can also exist—and does—as to the amount of protection due the rights of young people both in and out of school. There would seem little basis for disagreement, however, that society at large, and indeed the large majority of young people who do not abuse their freedom, deserve to be protected in *their* rights.

Because of the nature of our political system, and particularly the judicial part of the democratic process, very often the rights of the majority get far less attention than do those of the minority accused of abusive actions. Speaking on behalf of some 35,000

principals, I want to strongly reaffirm our support of "student rights" however that much-abused term may be defined. But I would respectfully remind this Committee and the judiciary that such rights must be balanced by responsibilities and that primary among them is the duty to respect the rights of others. Primary among those rights is the security of one's person and property.

To many of our members—and to many teachers as well—this right of the majority of students and school staff alike has all too often been overlooked in the desire to accord fair treatment to those accused of violence, vandalism, or disruption of the school and community. Recent decisions of the U.S. Supreme Court show a careful and well-reasoned effort to attain the difficult but necessary balance between these two interests. We fully support those decisions and will do our best to see that they are followed in spirit as well as letter. But we would urge this Committee and the Congress to keep this need for balance well in mind in any deliberations on programs involving school conduct; and, whatever actions might be taken to accord greater opportunity and freedom to youth, that the necessary power to protect the school and its students be retained by the school system and its building principals. Without such power, the public schools cannot stand, and the loss will not be the principal's; it will be society's.

4. **Teacher Apathy.** The teacher who takes an interest in all dimensions of a student—in his attitude and behavior outside of the classroom as well as inside of the classroom—seems to be a vanishing breed. A strong trend among teachers has developed to guide and direct students *only* in the classroom, leaving the responsibility for controlling misbehavior elsewhere entirely up to the "administration." The employment of security personnel, unfortunately, may encourage teachers further to drop a responsibility for student behavior, generally. *All* members of the teaching and administrative teams *must* carry responsibilities for students wherever they may be. Otherwise the disruptive student will exploit this reduced supervision to steal, to vandalize, and to congregate in the washrooms or elsewhere for gambling, extortion, drug peddling, and similarly tragic ventures.

5. **Parent Ignorance and/or Indifference.** One of the most appalling features of this nation-wide problem is the lack of

knowledge on the part of far too many parents as to the whereabouts of their children, day or night. In some cases this can be traced to pseudo-sophisticated attitudes dealing with the "mod" or permissive society. Apparently they have forgotten Alexander Pope's admonition, "Just as the twig is bent, the tree's inclined." Allowing children to run the streets unchecked and unsupervised is the perfect formula for producing the irresponsible young citizen and potential vandal. Adult education courses are in the "must" category for these careless parents with sponsorship from the school system and all segments of the media. It goes without saying that Congressional support will do much to lighten the load for already overburdened school districts as they attempt to inaugurate such programs. Concerted efforts on the local, state, and national levels should return substantial dividends.

6. **Collateral Curriculum.** Students in school and out of school are taught by many curricula. As Dr. Laurence Cremin, President of Columbia's Teachers College, has pointed out:

> The Children's Television Workshop has a curriculum. The advertising departments of the Ideal Toy Company and Love's Lemon Cosmetics have curricula. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and the *World Book Encyclopedia* have curricula . . . .
>
> It means, as James Coleman and Christopher Jencks—and one should probably add Plato—have pointed out, that the school never has *tabulae rasae* to begin with, that when children come to school they have already been educated and miseducated on the outside, and that the best the school can do in many realms is to complement, extend, accentuate, challenge, neutralize, or counter.

The opportunities for education or miseducation are burgeoning throughout society. We must all take seriously the fact that we are all taught by radio and television, peer groups and advertising agencies, and by magazines and museums. As Joseph Sorrentino, a juvenile court judge in Los Angeles County has noted, "TV will have to recognize its contribution to violence, and we must stop glorifying the negative and obscuring the positive." In summary, the environment of youth is a totality. Youth's attitudes and behavior are a reflection of all curricula, the non-school and the school. It is imperative that this totality desist from glamorizing crime and violence against persons.

Finally, it should be emphasized that the rise in youth crime is *not* primarily due to poverty since it exists in the affluent suburbs; it is *not* due to lack of opportunity to learn or to participate in school activities; and it is *not* caused by a restriction of alternatives. Students today enjoy more options for learning and for earning credit than at any time in the history of the American public school.

Some Recommendations

Given the serious nature of the problem, and given that students are an attitudinal microcosm of the larger society, what actions might be taken to improve the situation?

First. Since the crime motive is carried onto the campuses, and since school administrators cannot devote full attention to the single task of protecting student life and property, additional school personnel will be needed. These personnel should operate as members of the school staff, directly under the control of school personnel. Their training should be planned jointly by school personnel and by the juvenile officers of the departments of local police. *We strongly recommend enactment of legislation similar to the Safe Schools Act introduced in the Congress last session. Such legislation should provide monies for the proper training of school security officers as well as for their employment on a matching fund basis.* School districts should also receive federal assistance to install appropriate security devices to protect school buildings and adjacent playgrounds.

Second. Prompt attention by the courts to acts of alleged crime in schools is imperative. Delays and continuances should not be granted except for the most compelling reasons. The attitudes and morale of thousands of students and hundreds of faculty members may turn upon a single case involving two students or one student and one adult. Courts are one dimension of the collateral curriculum as well as being determiners of justice. The courts must accept this broader role and must act rapidly as well as fairly. We recommend with a sense of urgency that means

should be sought to reform the judicial process so that undue delays no longer can occur.

Third. Curriculum reform can play a part in redirecting negative student attitudes. The increased enrollment of youth in school has brought with it broader heterogeneity in the student populace. In many instances, this broader student base includes students who read poorly and write incoherently. Nathan Caplan of the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan has found that one major distinction between delinquents and non-delinquents is a belief by the delinquents that their chances of finishing high school and of getting a job were poor.

Another feature of curriculum reform involves what NASSP refers to as Action Learning. The popularity of such practical learning grows daily. One of the clear trends in secondary schools during the 1970s has been the significant expansion of work experience, community service, and other forms of action learning.

Interest in the integration of work and school goes beyond that of the student, teacher, and parent. President Gerald R. Ford, in a commencement address at Ohio State University, emphasized the educational value of close relationships between the classroom and the working world. He urged schools to work with business and labor to "create a new community of learning across the nation" and challenged the graduates to "show us how work-study programs can be a part of the on-going educational process."

Many administrators today are in the process of abandoning or modifying the school's custodial role. Students are being allowed to learn at appropriate posts in the community as well as within the school building. Real experience on the job and with public service agencies is bringing to youth new insights intellectually as well as a deeper appreciation of the interrelationships of all age groups and occupations in a community.

Fourth. Student involvement in any and all programs is imperative. In a recent study by I/D/E/A (the educational affiliate of the Charles F. Kettering Foundation) it was pointed out that we must start with students at a point where they can accept the fact that they have *a vested interest.* They may not be able to identify

with the school lavatory, but when it's their locker or car that is broken into it becomes the real thing. I/D/E/A cites an actual instance at a high school in the Northeast.

> The biggest single security problem... was the theft of tape decks, batteries, tires, and even cars from the school parking lot. The system's security director held an assembly for everyone who drove to school. Three hundred students showed up and after the assembly, 293 volunteered six at a time to patrol the parking lots. "When I say patrol," the director commented, "what we ask them to be are observers and reporters of incidents. We do not want them to take any overt action. When they see a car come on to the campus that does not belong there, the observers call the security officer or investigator-counselor and let them know about it. We have cut larcenies from automobiles from about 35 a month to almost nothing at that senior high school. The students were involved. They did it, not my security people. The more that I involve the students in the program, the greater opportunity we are going to have for success."

Fifth. Innovative programs of value (examples).

(1) The South San Francisco schools "staked" the students to a budget equaling the cost of repairing vandalism. The monies left at the end of the year went to student body projects. This cut costs of vandalism in half.

(2) Reduction of school size to the house plan (school within a school) or the development of sub-schools to reduce anonymity and the sense of not belonging have met with success in several sections of the country. Architects should refrain from recommending the large factory type or monolithic institutional giants which place too many students under one roof. Architectural improvements can also be designed to greatly improve internal security systems.

(3) Borrowing from the assignment of a hausmeister or head custodian who lives on the campus of the German *gymnasium*, several California schools are placing "trailer watchers" on school grounds. Last fall *Education U.S.A.* reported as follows:

> The Elk Grove Unified School District near Sacramento harks back to the days when teachers lived near the school. In the modern version a trailer site is built on each school grounds and a family with a trailer lives there rent free. Elk Grove began using "trailer watchers" 5 years ago, expanded the program to 9 schools last year and will have it at all 17 schools this year. The district

has had only two incidents of vandalism at schools with trailers and one troublemaker was caught by the "trailer watcher," says school official Mearl Custer, who conceived the program. It costs the district $3,000 to construct each trailer site but the system's vandalism bill used to be $20,000 annually. The district also pays the electricity at each site "which means you get a built-in watcher for about $10 a month per school," Custer says. Two other districts near Sacramento are also building trailer sites; the Modesto schools plan to; and a police official in Los Angeles is urging that district to try the idea in the Watts area.

A number of other innovative approaches could be included at this time but I believe the point has been adequately covered. The National Association of Secondary School Principals offers continuing assistance to this Committee and the 94th Congress in examining promising new practices and alerting all school systems as to their value.

Mr. Chairman, the seriousness of the present situation cannot be overstated. A too-little and too-late approach will cause irreparable harm to what has been regarded as the world's finest system of education. The magnitude of the problem is such that it cannot be handled by the states and local school districts alone. They are already hard pressed to meet the day-to-day demands in the training of America's children and youth. My colleagues in secondary education join with me in urging your full and serious consideration of substantial federal support programs which will stem the tide of vandalism and violence.

Thank you.

Related NASSP Publications

1. Ackerly, Robert L. *The Reasonable Exercise of Authority.* Washington, D.C.: The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1969.

2. Bailey, Stephen K. *Disruption in Urban Public Secondary Schools.* Reston, Va.: The National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1970.

3. Clement, Stanley, L. "School Vandalism: Causes and Cures." *NASSP Bulletin,* Vol. 59, No. 387, Jan. 1975.

4. Ertukel, Dee. "School Security: A Student Point of View." *NASSP Bulletin,* Vol. 58, No. 384, Oct. 1974.

5. Grealy, Joseph I. "Criminal Activity in Schools—What's Being Done?" *NASSP Bulletin,* Vol. 58, No. 382, May 1974.

6. McGowan, William N. "Crime Control in Public Schools: Space Age Solutions." *NASSP Bulletin,* Vol. 57, No. 372, April 1973.